



**DARK
HORSE
20 YEARS**

**BLADE OF THE
IMMORTAL**

109 \$2.99

**SHORTLIST
3 OF 5**

**PAINTED BY
DUSTIN
NGUYEN**

HIROAKI SAMURA

BLADE

OF THE IMMORTAL



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BLADE

OF THE IMMORTAL

art and story by

HIROAKI SAMURA

translation by DANA LEWIS

lettering and retouch by TOMOKO SAITO



CAST OF CHARACTERS



MANJI

Immortal alone
vowed to protect Rin
and live in her
quest for revenge



RIN

Last heir of the
Murasaki-yō shōji
destroyed by the
Ikkō-yō



HARAKI KAGIMURA

Powerful bangashō, the
servant of the Shōgun
and seeking the secret
of immortality



BURANDO

Deceased medical
examiner, saved from
prison by Kagimura



MŌZEN

Older more traditional
medical examiner,
working for Kagimura



DEWANDŌKE

Manji's villain,
a simple man imprisoned
for theft and arson

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *lessem-cha*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Manji meets the deceptive Kagimura at a *bolufo* stronghold near Edo Castle, where Manji is ambushed, overwhelmed, and captured. Kagimura assigns two medical examiners, Mōzen and Burando, the task of discovering the secrets of the *lessem-cha*, using Manji's body as their unwilling shortcut to immortality. With Manji drugged and unconscious, Mōzen begins to cut into his stomach with a scalpel...



designer **DEBRA BAILEY** editorial intern **MATT FYON**

editor **PHILIP SIMON** publisher **MIKE RICHARDSON**

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無限の住人



SHORTCUT
-part three-



YAH
HAH...!





HAHA!



MY FIRST
STEP IS
COMPLETE!



I
POSTULATED
THAT **PAIN**
TRIGGERS
REGEN-
ERATION.



I
SEARCHED
FOR A WAY
TO **NUMB**
IT.



AND I
WAS
CORRECT!
FRIGHTENING-
LY SO!



THE **FOG**
BEGINS TO
PART! THIS
NARROWS IT
DOWN TO TWO
OR THREE
ORGANS.





**I GIVE YOU
CREDIT,
A BRILLIANT
DEDUCTION!**

**BUT NOW,
BECAUSE
OF IT...
BECAUSE
OF IT...
I'M
TERRIFIED!**



**ARE YOU
BLIND,
MÖZEN-
DONO?**

**THIS
MEANS
THAT
NOW--**

**--RIGHT
NOW--
HE'S
NOT
IMMOR-
TAL!**



**IT'S AN
OPEN
WOUND!
YET,
YOU
CHOR-
TLE?!**



**NOT LIKE
YOU
TO YAP,
BURANDO.**

**PAN-
ICKED,
ARE
YOU?**



**THAT
YOU'VE
MISSED OUT
ON MAKING
MEDICAL
HISTORY?**



**WELL,
DON'T
WORRY
YOUR-
SELF.**

**IF
I'M
CORRECT,
THIS
MAN--**



IT'S...!
IT'S
CLOS-
ING,
MÖZEN-
DONO!!









**MŌZEN-
DONO!**

**PULL
YOUR
HAND
OUT!**



**IT'S
FUSING
WITH
YOU!**







SIX DAYS
LATER...

MŌZEN'S
STILL NOT
HIMSELF?

NO,
SIR.

IT PAINS
ME TO
WATCH
HIM.

HMMH...
OVER-
PLAYED
THE
RISKS.



WHAT
COULD *ONE*
EXPECT,
SIR?
TRANSFER
IMMOR-
TALITY...

...WHEN
YOU CAN'T
EVEN
OPER-
ATE?



SO...
IT WILL
TURN OUT
THE SAME ON
YOUR
WATCH?



NO,
ACTUAL-
LY...

...NOT
NECESSARILY
SO.

REALLY?



MŌZEN'S
SURGERY...

...IT WAS
A FAILURE,
BUT IT
LEFT ME
AN
IMPORTANT
CLUE.

IF
ALL
GOES
WELL...

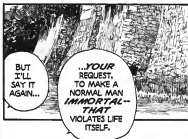


WHICH IS
WHY I NEED
A *FAVOR*,
HABAKI-
DONO.



WHAT
IS IT?

NO
ONE
MUST
HEAR.





...JUST
AS
WE HAVE,
HABAKI-
DONO.

I ASK YOU
TO VIOLATE
YOUR
BANSHI
CODE!



HEH...
IMPUDENT.



GOOD
ENOUGH...
I'LL
TRY.

THANK
YOU,
SIR!





HEY...
CAN'T
BLAME
HIM.

WHAT'S
WITH THE
GEEZER?



MORE
TO THE
POINT,
BOSS.

WHAT
ABOUT
YOU?
YOU LIKE
SITTIN' IN
HERE?

?



JAIL
BREAK!
GETTIN'
OUT!

PUTTING
ME ASIDE,
IT DON'T DO
YOU NO
GOOD STAYING
HERE, EH?



HAHN?
WELL...
YEAH.



BUT
EVEN
SO,
PAL...

ARMS
AND LEGS
SHACKLED,
GUARDS
ALL DAY LONG,
IRON
BARs...



FACE IT...
IT'S **GRIM**.
IF I HAD A
SWORD,
I'D SHOW YOU
SOMETHING.

BUT...

...THOSE
TWO DOGS
AND THAT
LITTLE
FLUNKY?



I WISH
THEY
WERE
ARMED.



THAT
LEAVES
JUST...

...**HABAKI**
KAGI-
MURA!

*THE NEXT
TIME THAT
BASTARD
COMES
AROUND...*



*LIKELY
OUTCOME?
NOT
DAMN
GOOD.*

BUT...
NOT
HOPE-
LESS.





I'M THEIR
PRECIOUS
SAMPLE.
THEY WON'T
MAIM ME BAD
STRAIGHT
OFF.

THAT'S
OUR
ONLY
HOPE.



THE
REAL
PROB-
LEM'S...



...**YOU,**
DEWA-
NO SUKE.

EVEN IF I
GET YOU OUT...
I CAN'T
GUARANTEE
YOU'LL BE IN
ONE PIECE.



ON THE
OTHER HAND...
IF I LEAVE
YOU HERE,
YOU'RE BACK
ON **DEATH**
ROW.

WHEN THIS
CRAZY
EXPERIMENT
DOESN'T
WORK...
AND THERE'S
NOT A CHANCE
IN HELL
IT WILL...



...I
WONDER
WHAT'S...
WORSE?

SHIT!



HEAD
HURTIN',
BOSS?

HEAD,
HELL,
EVERY-
THING'S
HURTING.





DOES
HE HAVE
*BERI-
BERI?*

*ANSWER
ME!*

BERIBERI: PAINFUL VITAMIN DEFICIENCY DISEASE WHICH CAN CAUSE LIMB PARALYSIS.



NOTHIN'
TO
WORRY
ABOUT,
SIR!

JUST FELT
DIZZY,
LIKE.
HE'S GETTIN'
BETTER!







TO BE CONTINUED...!

無限の人



Send letters and fan art to:

BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL, c/o DARK HORSE COMICS,
10966 SE MAIN STREET, MILWAUKEE, OREGON 97222

www.darkhorse.com • Blade@darkhorse.com

All fan artwork, letters, and e-mails submitted
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Dear Blade of the Immortal,

I started reading *Blade of the Immortal* when I found the "Heart of Darkness" trade in my native town of Lisbon, Portugal, two years ago. I was immediately impressed by the exquisite art style and the story line. The first thing I did when I arrived to Chicago in the United States to work on my PhD was order all the twelve trades of past issues and start collecting the monthly issues.

Honestly, I think this is the best regular comic of the last few years. It's the only one that still makes me rush to the store on a monthly basis. The story lines are simple, yet at the same time enormously powerful—a hard warrior trying to compensate for past sins; a girl seeking revenge for the murder of her parents; a group of bitter warriors craving more power. I guess this is one of the strengths of *Blade*—Samura does not try to unnecessarily complicate things through amazingly complex plots and bizarre characters like in other comics, but he has been managing to write suspenseful and unexpected events into his larger scheme.

I think, however, that there are still many surprising things regarding both Manji's future and past. Manji, even while being the main character, is still the one person in the story we know the least about. We know what lies behind the motivations of Rin, Mokke, Hyeokkum, and Anatsu, but Manji—along with Master Soei, perhaps—is still a mystery. We know that he was once an amazingly skilled warrior, but he seems to avoid using his fighting skills, perhaps from self-blame and regret in killing his brother-in-law. In "Cry of the Worm" we see that Manji, after beheading Diku Shinsura, reproaches himself, saying "You always go too far . . ." In the "Twilight" series, Manji did not use a weapon to fight Gilchi—he used fists instead, and only at the end of "Dietower" does Manji decide again to use his old skill. It's almost like Manji has a "pain wish" and is not really that sloppy, since even if you are immortal it would always be less painful to rely on your sword skill than on your aching flesh.

To end this letter, I express the hope like all Samura fans that you start publishing *Obikkoishi* soon. Thanks!

Carlos Madeira
Chicago, Illinois

Thank you, Carlos, for reading each month! Your thoughts on Manji's "pain wish" hinge on Manji's actual enjoyment of pain and self-mutilation. Manji is no stranger to pain, but he

never really seems to seek it out with glee. Samura doesn't lead us to believe that Manji relishes any of the hurt that comes his way. Whether hacking at his own arm to free himself from a trap or taking a hit in order to bring his opponent closer in, Manji relies on his immortality a bit too much . . . but he's no masochist. Perhaps Manji's just a tad sloppy? Look to Shira for the sadomasochistic action. I may be wrong, but Manji's favorite pastimes are probably eating, smoking, and napping. Any opinions? Oh, and thanks for the vote on *Obikkoishi*, Mr. Madeira. Look for it in 2006! We'll have a release date within a few months.

Hello, Guys!

I'm a fan of Mr. Hiroaki Samura's work by mere chance. I happened to catch the series about a year into its run because of the artwork, and I am sending you some fan art of little Rin. I am obsessed with the whole attraction issue between Manji and Rin. For God's sake, when will he figure out she's not a little girl anymore!?!? You guys do an awesome job with the translation and the page layout. It is probably tedious work, but *Blade of the Immortal* is unlike any other manga I've ever read because of it. Thank you guys for this unique experience.

Karla Contreras
San Diego, California



Art by Karla Contreras, San Diego, California



Manji by Lauren Taylor, Omaha, Nebraska

It was great meeting you at the 2005 San Diego Comic Con, Karla, and I look forward to seeing more of your art. More! More! Fighting through some tough times, Rin has certainly grown as a character, but will she ever stop reminding Manji of his younger sister? Manji and Rin certainly share a special bond, but only Hiroaki Samura knows where that will lead.

Dear Samurases,

Blade of the Immortal #106 couldn't have come at a better time. Maybe now Manji will get the counselling he needs (the guy is pretty unmanageable). Shame it has to proceed with his being hung against a wall, but tough love is an absolute necessity when it comes to recidivists. Good, too, that Samura's keeping Rin out of the way, as she'd only go soft on

hers. But most importantly, does a shower or bath come with his room? How long has it been? Fifty-plus issues since Soei's daughter pinched shut her nose and steam-cleaned him? And dear, little Dôa—not only smart with knives, but a talented home decorator as well. House Beautiful and Dr. Phil? Please Philip (not the aforementioned, unless . . . ?), just where is this series headed?

Jamie Umstatt
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Nope, I'm no Dr. Phil—unless nursing in psychology in college will get me my own TV show! You can call me Dr. Kessen-chu, and I'll dispense better wisdom. For example: Manji's no racistist. (Unless . . . ? Unless Samura-dono has something up his sleeve.) He's no angel, but it's doubtful that he'll fall back into his old, old ways of slaughtering innocent men. His feet seem firmly planted on a path towards redemption, especially after his sister was killed and he made that vow to Yasubikuni in "Blood of a Thousand."

Dear Blade of the Immortal,

This is a painting I did in class last year when I was bored with painting landscapes. I thought the idea of the worms pulling the limbs back together was cool. Anyway, I hope you like it and I would love to see it in the book someday. Thankst

Your fan,
Lauren Taylor
Omaha, Nebraska

Nice job, Lauren. The kessen-chu are my favorite supporting characters and the unsung heroes of Blade of the Immortal. Thanks for keeping Manji's worry pals in your thoughts and giving them a chance to show off in your pinup. Look for more kessen-chu action in future issues.

Dear Hiroaki,

I started with Blade of the Immortal #103 and now have all the back issues except one! This has been the first new comic book for me in a long time where

I desired to spend the money to get the back issues. Keep up the good work!

Warren Nae
Harrisburg, Pennsylvania

Kudos for catching up so quickly, Warren, and welcome to your monthly dose of Samura perfection. Blade #103 is one of my favorite episodes, with some great fan pinups, too. You've proven your resourcefulness by managing to find all of those back issues and writing your first letter. Now write to us again. You'll notice that we try to put sweet extras into our monthly offering when we can—extras that don't always find their way into the trade collections.

A special "Thank you" to Dustin Nguyen for contributing another stellar color pinup for our back cover. Look for Dustin's Authority Revolution, Wildcats, and Batman collections in your local comic book store. As always, much love to Filipino artist Ihomar Soriano for his "Rumble to Rage" funnies. See you next month, when a fanciful Rin cover distracts us from the horrors of Kagimura's medical loans and we find out just what Manji and Dewanosuke were looking at in the corner.

—Philip



JAMIE-UMSTATT 2005

Made by Jamie Umstatt Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

"Rumble to Kaya"

by Thomas Sotomayor, Patsy C. The Philippines

THE MEETING
WITH AGAY'AMA
WENT QUITE WELL
BUT STILL
HE HAD NO
CHECKED
OUT...

...CUNNING
OLD FOX!

PERHAPS
THE NEW
HEAD OF THE
SHANGU
SHOULD PLAY
WITH THEM
A LITTLE...

...
ALRIGHT
THEN!

WAAH!

HE'S
MINE!

THAT'S
IT...
JUST
FOLLOW
ME!

—!?!

BWA
HAW
H--

無限の住人

GLOSSARY

Bangashira: Head of the *banshū*.

Banshū: Officers serving under the Shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the Shogun himself.

Beriberi: Painful vitamin deficiency disease which can cause limb paralysis.

Dōjō: A school for combat and self-defense training in martial arts; here, a training center for swordsmanship.

Edo: Capital of pre-modern Japan. Later renamed Tokyo.

Itō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Krasen-chū: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Mukōshi-ryū: The sword school led by Rint's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Ryū: A sword school.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "cruz gammatra" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastika*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "wellness," from *su* — "well" + *asti* — "he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastika* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *saussavāṭika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *manji* in Japanese. The *saussavāṭika* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swastika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the unretouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.



NEXT MONTH: SHORTCUT, Part 4 of 5



Mozon's recently botched "exploratory operation" on Manji brings unexpected results. Backstabbing Busando, Kagurura's most deranged medical examiner, is about to have his chance to discover the secrets of the *kyosen-cha*, the mystical bloodworms that heal Manji's wounds and grant him near-immortality. Enraged and in chains in Kagurura's prison, Manji befriends his dirt-walled cellmate, Dewarokube, and begins to formulate an escape plan. (And isn't Rin cute?)

Manji! Prose by Dashi Nguyen



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Vortex FX